Coyote and Raven Talk About Indigenizing Environmental Education: Or Reconfiguring the Shenanigans of Otis O’Dewey Esquire

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Abstract
First Nations tricksters, Coyote and Raven, work to indigenize Environmental Education but run up against mainstream languages, technologies, and educational practices. They try to do an end-run around the cognitive backfield, then portage through marginal spaces, but find that working between Indigenous languages and mainstream ones can work best by being conversational and bringing in humour and ways of knowing that do not only privilege post-Enlightenment agency but use understandings that gesture toward localized Indigenous practices and changing West Coast (Canada) geographies.

Résumé
Lesdits Filous, le Coyote et le Corbeau, tentent de réformer l’éducation environnementale pour lui donner un caractère plus autochtone, mais ils se heurtent aux langues, aux technologies et aux pratiques éducationnelles dominantes. Ils s’efforcent de contourner le défenseur cognitif, puis portagent à travers des espaces marginaux, mais ils constatent que le meilleur moyen de communication entre les langues autochtones et les langues dominantes est l’interactivité, l’humour et les savoirs qui non seulement privilégient la représentation de l’ère ayant suivi le Siècle des lumières, mais encore qui font usage de connaissances favorables à l’endroit des pratiques autochtones locales et de la géographie changeante de la Côte ouest (Canada).

Keywords: Indigenize, trickster, Coyote and Raven, environmental, curriculum

ama7 sqit nilhsten skwatsits tsexox

geographies in flux sea levels changing ris fall ris
our villages even those hundreds of feet above waterline ing
hundreds of miles inland became over time sea
peninsulas defined by water on two sides and a third become ar chi pe la go s
smatterings of seemingly unconnected isolated epistemo-geographic s
identified not by their submarine and occulted connections
with one another but by their surface features such as being other than mainland
extra-continental  surrounded by water  disconnected  modal  
islands like understandings have to do with levels of awareness  tidal shifts  
gravitation (heavenly) bodies in relation points of view  
if the sea level went down sufficiently the archipelago would become one island  or even part of the mainland a peninsula  
so too our thoughts  ideas  actions  
these are the common knowings  the landscape  of indigeneity  
reminding me of when N Scott Momaday was asked  
how long does it take to become indigenous  he said he couldn’t remember  
and right about here I should be citing my father and our other elders  
saying ‘ahh’  

ice is part of mother earth  part of climate  cold congealings  
drawn from sky tree ocean river bodies time shaped into geography corporalities  

ice migrating  retreating  advancing  gouging  tides of frozen clouds wind  
our stories are older than words  longer than cellular  molecular memory  
they are the impress of experience onto physical being  
rather than merely axonic  dendritic  synaptic holographics  
we are the etchings of story  of landscape  of weather  

(Cole, 2006)

dewey and raven are in a darkened room in moose jaw saskatchewan  they were  on their way to give a keynote at an environmental education conference in thunder bay when their semi-restored offwhite 1958 Austin Healey 3000 bugeye sprite with a terra preta racing stripe blew a valve cover gasket and main crankshaft bearing got a flat tire and the steering wheel came off  on a positive note they managed to get to the side of the road before the radiator blew and the super 44 series flowmaster muffler fell off after hailing a passing transport and getting a lift to the greyhound station which was closed for tommy douglas day  they found a tim horton’s open and though they only had a credit card and timmy’s electronic payment system was down  a kind local named vince bought them coffee and lunch after listening to their tale of woe  vince said heck come on over to my place and we can youtube your presentation or skype it  so off they went in his 1957 dodge sweepside pickup with external mounted mauve cab lights and dangly dice  we got to vince’s doublewide which was surrounded by a sagebrush cactus devil’s club garden with locally made and painted ceramic lawn dwarfs  the inside was a replica of the interior of a starship complete with stargate transporter and hyperdrive console  a vast complex of blinking lights screens and speakers  there were pocket doors sliding panels and a remote controlled sliding door that closed us off in a quiet workspace  all of it had been bought at garage sales  okay says vince in his best dr spock accent listen up!  
everything is cued but remember this is a pirate radio station so whatever you do don’t push this red button just the green one  any trouble here’s a 10 gigabyte timemachine archive of every podcast you’ll ever need  there’s a fresh pot of coffee
when carl jung touched down in hopiland new mexico 1925 he must have wondered about his own sanity and the collective otherness that so enthralled him interesting how many ideas he is acknowledged as being the creator of that actually came from indigenous sources euros have always been discoverers of things not lost which is how so many of our ideas and practices have become copyrighted patented and trademarked

raven it’s provenance like found notions of indigeneity discovered while beachcombing in a coral archipelago constructed from submarine elements of indigeneity this is how mainstream research works dividing categorizing breaking into smaller units what are not actual units of anything that exist anywhere but in the (de)constructed theoretical and/or proprio-conceptual spaces and the postsumed knowledge arising from those spaces which becomes normalized further fragmenting fragments then gluing them together disparately and calling it organic or holistic or progress so this island chain topography represents the result of colonial policies caused by climate change — sea rising separating mainland first peoples’ communities into archipelagos
islands separated from land from seabed from one another then mined and clearcut

well coyote looks like we’ve got our cut worked out for us our knowledges are tailored or discarded our livelihoods hypercontrolled by unregulated capitalism our knowings are no longer recognizable they do not have our sounds our rhythms ah comme la neige a neigé (Nélligan, 2006)

toujours l’hiver I just had a brain wave raven (probably the after effect of microwaves from my cellphone) how can mainstream environmental education curriculum offer our stl’atl’imx students cultural continuity is it not rather simulacrum verisimilitude

I’m assuming that is a rhetorical question rather than just questionable rhetoric

since traditional mainstream academic research protocols fix the people of the land as ‘other’ and not just as simulacral indigenous elite “boutique Indians” (J. Price, personal communication, November 13, 2011) trapped forever in the j’accusative case subjunctive mood and subordinate clause because not only are we grammatically somatically and emphatically ulterior and exterior to majoritarian education (except when it comes to prisons residential schools and other places of detention and reprogramming) and on the wrong side of the tracks that weren’t even there 135 years ago but the silence on anything relating to systemic injustice and genocide is so loud and self-sustaining that...

raven I thought I’d take advantage of that elliptical pause

it’s actually speech pebbles …

it’s not as though we can own or claim authority over-of-about-in relation-to mainstream post-enlightenment pacific northwest centre-of-right environmental education curriculum both-and-or-with its rhizomatic-radicality

more ‘in’ and less ‘formation’ coyote sometimes specificity needs to make way for context you have to actually engage in dialogue and pretend that the words referring to the things are actually talking about more than just other words like the word ‘things’

it’s not intentional crypticness it’s just I can’t indigenize mainstream curriculum or any other english expression except by renaming or lip-pointing and of course by doing though I can’t say how it is so using the english language more of a maze than labyrinth
is saying the word making it manifest or is it just oralizing representationality
I’m not sure if I’m more comfortable wading in language or becoming fully
immersed because both are probably necessary in order to gesture toward
our knowings the bothness is seen by some to be binarizing however one
drum + one drum = one drum + one drum not two essentialized drums the
two is part of the essentializing

I’m glad you said that because my response retroactively erased as yours
progressed I’ve been using words as geographies piling them up and generally
not using them as ratiocinational communication devices in order to talk
about an indigenous vision of the environment I can’t just engage in ordered
prosaic rationalist discourse that would be working against inclusivity and
promoting sameoldsameold

it’s a huge dilemma what role can there be for an indigenous voice what
possible use is decolonization without some movement toward the essence of
what preceded remaining and will be all in the present tense whichistosay
always now

if one cannot understand the idea and importance of seasonal migration as a
survival and interrelational strategy where is the continuational authenticity
lost in the corners that used to be folds circumferential arcs we know
that tipis like all circular and conical domains don’t have corners squared
diametrical hypotenuses aside

not to forget ishkins wigwams igloos yurts and myriad other indigenous
architectures

how does one indigenize what is not indigenous across what line or assumed
paradigm right of way algorithm square root or coderivative does one drag this
sometime something so it might become indigenous ensconced in the spirit of
the land the territoriality how can this be done using settlers sprachen where
there are no indigenous toeholds no places of common threading with what
went before and-still-is

in the knots and weavings of storytelling indigenousness can become it by
spinning weaving knitting knotting darning suturing and acknowledging the
context of the practices and the sources of materials

how can any change take place raven is change not really just a layering
what settler xenomorpheme can relay the essence of indigeneity in its
particularities contextualities

the further we describe things to be away and apart from who we are the
more intimately they become the central focus of our activities we centre on that which we react to besides we’re all human in-spirit part of a greater becoming

which ‘we’ are you talking about

I-and-me a plural singularity neither of which is singular or plural

sounds like zen you might want to dispense with pronouns and nouns altogether and just use transformer parts of speech

by taking responsibility for my-our actions and their consequences I-me-we gesture toward ucwalmicwts based pedagogies

in the english language I am twisted spatially by the whirling masses of syntactical spin indigenizing environmental education means contextualizing acknowledging relationalities the explicatory narrative itself is probably anti- or at least post-indigenous

in ucwalmicwts there is no way of putting together ideas like those pervading mainstream environmental education theories — calling forests rivers and mountains fish and medicines ‘resources’ they were always family but this is being lost or misplaced

you mean like the ‘sustainability development’ mantra of modernity’s progress narrative

we have perhaps 1% of the words in ucwalmicwts that exist in english yet in our language everything has spirit is spirit not as affix or add on we are the land the land is us not just metaphorically or figuratively everything comes from and is the natural world including our language even that which might appear to be unnatural alien and perverse

the elders tell us we start to change when we become ‘academic’ and analytical in our thinking and speech abstracting the natural world is conjugating dark matter subversive energies there needs to be organicness in our thinking connectivities with the natural world is there room in settler thinking for opening up to equivalency of knowings — the english language needs more silence more less moreless

instead of organically linked carbon bonds we get saturated ideas and attitudes more like hydrocarbons than carbohydrates indigenizing comes not from the adoption and promotion of exclusively western post-enlightenment ideas
including economic progress de-colonization models and turning people into numbers percentages blips on a graph but from blending their essence with indigenous ways of knowing for instance not changing relationality into identity we’ve had enough psychologization of indians making us into subunits of special education dumbing us up down sideways allways no wonder our young ones are becoming mobius at one with at many with what is key and crucial and critical is how the withness is negotiated and vetted who is driving whose vehicle is it what is its ecological and ethical footprint environment cannot just be described talked about measured and graphed it must always be loved honoured and respected is there a case in english for that if empathy and compassion are everywhere in one’s world one does not need words for these unless the words are anchors or buoys within the language in case the referentiality sunders breaks away becomes unmoored adrift in order to be able to approach environmentalism as we experience it in our languages our children need to learn how to companion-word plant and not just analyze phonemes morphemes and other linguistic in[ter]ventions [enter the fairies of dullaghan] what about the word ‘curriculum’ itself while the settlers tell us it comes from currere we see it having a three-pronged genealogy consisting of multi-lateral coderivatives from the past the future and from a dysauditory linguistic space curare: a Carib word referring to an organic metabolic toxin causing neuro-paralysis, krklm: a neo-retro-paramorphopoeic radical originating in the future, and kr7xlhm: a dysphonic audiotrope from the tl’atl’imx language, “7” representing a glottal stop, the “lh” is a lisped “l” sound, like the initial phoneme in Welsh “Llwelyn.” the “x” is pronounced like the terminal phoneme in the Scottish “loch” (Cole & O’Riley, 2002, p. 134) well if it’s not the fairies of dullaghan reminding me to live in a/the/some ‘real’ which is to say illusive world of impugning meaning from the pretense of pre-existing meaning it is easy enough to follow the cultural rhizomes not understand mind you but intercept surveil name and excavate ‘tis the business of fingers manu facting digit izing raven are we still talking about indigenizing environmental education
as to indigenizing it that might be construed as reacting to the settler universe moving from word to referent in terms of signification making the list the thing

but the referent itself is caught in the web of languaging describing the description both are caught in the thrall of talk the tug-of-war as to whose conceptual space sets the rules

when hamlet said ‘the rest is silence’ he was talking about not talking about but the poison worked too fast and he died before he was able to say what he really wanted though he didn’t know how so he had to make do with the referent of silence which is more than just an eternal pause and other than just a condensed beat and not quite a gerund-in-waiting whoooooooooosh ing

the reference of to the referent...the significance of the signifier the ing of the refer

coyote all this talk of rhizomes is making me hungry I’d rather eat one or make a basket or cup of tea besides our youth need figures of speech words from up home ucwalmicwts has always been our breath our inspiration

well raven I’m trying as best I can to tramp through this moonscape of a linguisphere of the english language if I’m going to indigenize I have to start somewhere though not necessarily at a the beginning

wrakk look at the human child of a dozen moons whose phonemes and morphemes are limited to deh eh dah meh mah but there is no impairment no deficit in terms of communication the little one does not lack is not in deficit mode seems able to express all that s/he wants to no need for a million units of alphabetically facilitated meaning this child can walk into a crowd anywhere in the world and interact fully without knowing a single word of any of the languages being spoken how does education educate this facility out of that child can curriculum be indigenized what are the byproducts and effluences of digitizing indigeneity

ucwalmicwts has what elder robert charlie (personal communication, May 21, 1996) called transformer nouns transformer verbs we had them until the white linguists started meddling with our language transformers are a crucial part of our culture by re-empowering our language we can indigenize environmental education

are there rubrics
we are the rubrics

look at the expression esd ‘education for sustainable development’ nobody up home would use those words when speaking english and there’s no way to talk about the environment that way in our language how can development be sustainable if you take more from the earth than you give back in english in ucwalmicwts it has no meaning

however “minorizing the majority discourse” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986) to use deleuze and guattari’s ideas about creating places of power within majoritarian linguistic spaces is a way of exorcizing your own thinking from settler languages even though you might not believe in the idea of the demons you are trying to expel when conversation becomes argumentation people can actually agree except that they don’t agree they are agreeing

current human post-industrial activity locally and globally is not sustainable we must do with less give back more than we take but no-one seems to want to talk about that or determine how to determine it

raven how would we know if it happened ‘the indigenizing’ what are the rules of evidence who determines the whether who is the authority where does imperialism fit in the colonization are we simply the new irish will it take another 400 years to catch up to their centuries of I have to say there is no word in ucwalmicwts that does justice to what they and other indigenous peoples suffered

indigenizing depends on who is in charge of stitching nexus along the beadway the trans-textualities and speaking of the irish how long before we first peoples get our own home rule and until then will settlers determine all our laws our values our thoughts

in the palestinian west bank they talk about settlers building new settlements — in canada this is not news but normalized activity for centuries

indigenous environmental curriculum is not just located where there is a sign ‘indigenous environmental curriculum’ which is the naked unadorned singularity defying the built environment of coloniality ach y fi mochyn du get out of the cabbages with you

curriculum yes raven it’s not as though all of our stories and lives lived can be funneled into a latin word that didn’t have time to change clothes or case before changing languages and the sun moved from the bull to the fish to the water carrier with the goat kr7klm (Cole & O’Riley, 2002) browsing on the erstwhile
commons words words words and the band played god save the monarch as the x and the british fought over the turf of empire how many canadians how many indigenes died singing that song fighting for empire land of the free enterprise unregulated self-regulating environmental education for us is very much about sovereignty and self-determination economic equity

the front page of the newspaper reads 16 first nations children die in northern reserve from sniffing gasoline whose environmental curriculum is that a result of

forests are deemed by the anti-environment(al) movement to be net as well as gross liabilities they get in the way of the way the tao of profitability because there’s stuff rotting there right now or ready to rot which produces greenhouse gases so even by being alive ecotones ecosystems are committing suicide homicide biocide sounds like harper’s environmental platform kill the forests the trees the rivers the sky kill everything that can be sold or refuses to be then use carbon credit offsets to turn the environment into tradable certificates and permits so governments and corporations can destroy the natural world and hide the crime in plain sight in economics textbooks parliamentary budgets and free trade laws this is not indigenous environmental anything

raven a conservative think (if you can call it that) tank put forward exactly that hypothesis destroy underbrush berries moss lichen mushrooms roots and overstory — and replace it with one-true-story of resource extraction this has become the sustainability curriculum for k-12 in this province

if the mainstream is going to facilitate our environmental curriculum there can be nothing in it for the first peoples same old colonizer story same refrain currere currere currere present active infinitive to run mutual revolution of blackholes around a common centre of gravity grave gravitas curriculum second conjugation noun nominative-accusative-vocative singular referring to a race a race course a racing chariot (pause) but what is that to us when the ts’ilqoten were chasing us in their canoes that was when we had to enact survival technologies and curri cu lum was not one of them we didn’t have or need wheels let alone chariots cobbled roads race courses or latin declensions

up home we’ve never been caught up in the derivation of english words we know the effect of words without knowing where they came from what they mean or how to pronounce them correctly at a fancy wooden dinner table made from forest trees in the settler’s language the word wood is generic it doesn’t even name the tree or trees that gave life and spirit to the table except collectively wood in english is dead tree just as pork is dead pig this is how settler words work they are the axes saws mills fractionating towers and standing armies of settlerdom disseminated in the form of memos speeches
acts and ministerial orders like ‘cut down the forests’ ‘extract stones from the ground’ ‘kill the animals’ ‘destroy the salmon’ ‘foul the water’ ‘poison the air’. Even the euphemisms are toxic. The English language as used by mainstream government, industry and corporate media is a fleet of stealth bombers, naval destroyers, a death star. They remain in landscape surveilling when everything else has been destroyed, sold or discarded. They are the archives after the archives have been destroyed.

Coyote: What might an indigenized curriculum look, sound, feel, taste, smell like if we were to forget about what lies beneath the bruised and calloused epidermis of the English language? What would it look like, feel like?

It would start with a conversation in the kitchen over tea, at a dipnet over the river, on the trapline, on the street, in the alley, not necessarily with another human being, but with allyu (Rengifo, 1998), the trans-species extended family.

What constitutes traditional stl’atl’imx ways of interacting with environment when many elders were loggers, some even worked in clearcutting to survive in today’s socio-economy? Traditions have multiple dynamic and complex interfaces. Some temporally-spatially aligned with the old ways, and some with capitalist context, wormholes with extremal Reissner-Nordström embouchures.

Coyote: When you think about your culture from within your original language system, you experience it differently than from within the space of an acquired language-culture. More than a denotative, connotational, relational context, a gesturing toward gesturing.

Raven: Do you think the EE conference audience will warm to this kind of narrative that has neither bullet points nor PowerPoint slides nor “circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one explaining what each one was to be used as evidence against us” (Guthrie, 1967/1993)?

Whether or not they do, we cannot enact a fractionating, analytical rational, deconstructive monomaniacal presentation.

Yes, it is more of a soliloquy or parallel vaguely tangential monologues.

But the storying itself is not mainstream. There is virtually no character development just an endless denouement.

Is it inclusive in the ways we have been taught? Is it honouring the peripheral as well as the focussed?

We could be more specific about the subtitle aspect.
something like this maybe in the first installment of the otis o’dewey saga coyote and raven shared a narrative of transpraxiated etymology disiterative ontology the geographization of time and capric dimensionality this narrative builds on that

father o’dewey entering downstage left declaims *ama7 sqit* and *begorra* sisters and brothers otis o’dewey esquire oblate of mary immaculate is at hand

he was bigger than life arriving up home two generations after simon fraser’s paddleby a decade before the cariboo miners sappers and settlers his plan was to transform us into implements of heavenly empire using mother church in the instrumental case

yes he was the youngest son of an irish croppie and a gift to the church from his parents himself becoming a big *smirt* of a *culchie* more flesh on him than any three *ucwalmicw*

he brought his own seeds and seed potatoes and had us dig gardens so he could grow his native comestibles though I’ve never known the potato to be an irish native

just as the italians claim the tetraploid triticum durum semolina including *pagnotte di enna*—used for making italian pasta—my understanding this grain originated in the middle east which is actually western asia and as for the tomato (for sauce) or wolfpeach it seems to have originated in the peruvian altiplano *che peccato italia*

thank you for that intellectual property genesis story update mr o’dewey esquire sir says coyote *kr7klhm* as a *stl’atl’imx* environmental pedagogy traces the lines of flight of traditional irish and *stl’atl’imx* protocols mixed with cagean post-xxx aggregate surfactant-mycelle ratio figurations such that ... ah just when I get to the rising action those three pebbles come clunking out of my conceptual space-time the waterways must be in flood or the conceptual space potatoes need hilling ...

you don’t have to dance with *the wasteland* boogie with *nouvelles impressions d’afrique* or limbo with the *d’antin manuscript* your own style will do quite well if you let it

indigenizing environmental education means using all of our languages *thrrrrkklkkkwrak*

our own historied geographies reside in the eternal unpresent that is not in
any tense we have them growing in post-conceptual coldframes as epistems episeeds episcions epicotelydons epistemcells epistemologies epidemics of evanescent thinking cemented with unreason strangeness number -3 which brings to mind the quechua spud that grew up home long before the whiteman came did they not think we had seatrade rivertrade laketrade walkabouttrade remember how surprised the sáma7 was coyote to see our potato patches down in the fraser valley all hilled so nice and neat

coyote how do you say potato in your language

what kind of potato cooked or fried or poached or in the ground

all of the above

harrrrrooooooo!!

no the other language

mostly we gesture with our head chin or lips but sometimes we say petáok but mostly we call it papa we know it comes from pachamama from between the 586th and 687th vertebrae of the hemispheric mountain backbone that’s what the quechua sailors told us it was a grand ruse to keep father o’dewey away from that black book trying to make us christjesusalmightys by asking him about food or the english or sasquatches

so father o’dewey we’d say what about your encounter with our sasquatch neighbours

ah it was a sad state siochán leat I was a shadow of my own former self and they’re a marvel to be sure the rephaim nephilim emim and anakim genesis told of giants in the land and it’s only fitting that I share the gift of literacy the good word for surely this is the first garden that ever was

that will do father the sasquatch are uncommonly sensitive and are acutely aware of your intentions even from a great distance surely they’d hide or wait in ambush for they’ll not be saved not least from their own cultures

literacy exudes from every pore of them ecoliteracy paraliteracy and transliteracy they read everything their survival depends on reading the sky the waters the mountains the forests signs scents tastes textures even the trace a bird makes in the air the shadow of the finned ones the footprints of the sixlegged the slitherers’ tracks

don’t you be trying to talk to the sasquatches about curriculum or the talltales
in your blackbook your lisp accent and heightened saliva production radically changes the meaning of ucwalmicwts words you’d be better off pointing motioning and signing

you’ve seen how we cultivate potatoes and camas how we practice controlled burning and companion planting how we harvest only what we need how we look after the egglaying waters our plant neighbours give us nourishment and compassion they are our teachers and elders and their lessons go far beyond reasoned discourse and poststructuralist imaginaries so be careful what you put into your mouth and what comes out of it they give lessons no book could ever hold no language ever shape

you may know the ways of your own country father colonized as it might be but you need to learn the manners of this land as a visitor you bring your queer krklm goats that see spirits of the dead it puts a good many out of ease kalan7wi they were eating my roof this morning

and the clothes on the line and bushes says raven and my fishing net krklm says I you’re a true rogue and if you want a chariot race with your mouth you’ll do it with someone else’s vetements you’re a skanger and ‘struth I’ve seen them eat their own tether besides it’s this jesus trinity holy ghost and mary the people are resisting

they’re not resisting says he they’re praying in latin

sure to make you feel good and to be a pleasant host but not a one believes the malarkey and don’t be in the stooks about it but know the elders are not wanting transplanted ideas forced into ucwalmicwts we have our own word gardens that come from this land

surely the nib of your goats eating our very homes and the shirt off our back shows they have different original instructions than the goats in our mountains or they’ve been socialized to eat anything they’re visitors too and won’t look you in the eye but will eat the hat you’re wearing with every good intention and a calm glance it won’t do

siochán leat peace be with you father but you’re not understanding pleasurable mishearing and stratified levels of ucwalmicwts talk you’re missing the heart of the story don’t be interpreting it or translating it coding it tell me do your old ones revere trees

we are taught the ancient trees are the eyes ears and very breath of the land
(raven looking around) what happened to o´dewey and the goats
back into our dreams raven let’s go pick some berries nia·wen
indeed coyote rustication kukwstum´c

Notes

1 For those unfamiliar with the Ucwalmicwts language, 7 indicates a glottal stop.

Notes on Contributor

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References